

Message Text

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S E C R E T BEIRUT 8827

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, LE, US, PINT, EAID
SUBJECT: CALL ON PRESIDENT SARKIS

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT SARKIS APPEARED CONFIDENT AND RELAXED AFTER HAVING FORMED HIS FIRST GOVERNMENT, AND IS NOW LOOKING AHEAD TO RECONSTRUCTION. HE STILL AWAITS AN ISRAELI RESPONSE TO HIS LATEST POSITION ON SOUTH LEBANON, AND FINDS THE ISRAELI POSITION "INCOMPREHENSIBLE." THIS WEEK HE WILL BE ADDRESSING THE QUESTION OF COLLECTION OF HEAVY ARMS, BUT HE APPEARS CAUTIOUSLY CONFIDENT ABOUT THE SECURITY SITUATION IN GENERAL. END SUMMARY.

2. NEW GOVERNMENT. I CALLED ON PRESIDENT SARKIS AT PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN BAABDA AT NOON DEC 13, ACCOMPANIED BY MOLINEAUX. I COMPLIMENTED THE PRESIDENT ON HIS CHOICE OF A CABINET, SAYING IT APPEARED TO BE A WISE AND CAUTIOUS APPROACH TO LEBANON'S PROBLEMS. HE SAID THAT HIS CRITERIA FOR CHOICE OF CABINET MEMBERS WERE COMPETENCE, HONOR, AND EFFICIENCY. HE NEEDED A RELATIVELY YOUNG GROUP TO REBUILD THE COUNTRY, AND TO DEVOTE ITSELF TO THIS TASK RATHER THAN TO POLITICS. A "POLITICAL" CABINET WOULD HAVE BEEN A FIASCO SINCE ANY REAL CABINET WORK WOULD HAVE TO AWAIT THE OUTCOME OF A PROCESS OF POLITICAL RECONCILIATION, FOR WHICH THE GROUNDWORK HAS YET TO BE LAID. HE HAD DELIBERATELY CHOSEN A CABINET OF MEN WHO ALL HAD EXPERIENCE IN THE PRIVATE ECONOMIC SECTOR. HE HOPED THAT PROGRESS IN RECONSTRUCTION WOULD CREATE THE NECESSARY CIRCUMSTANCES FOR A FUTURE POLITICAL DIALOGUE.

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3. RECONSTRUCTION. SARKIS DESCRIBED LEBANON AS A

"CONVALESCING PATIENT." HE OUTLINED HIS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR RECONSTRUCTION: FIRST, EMERGENCY RELIEF, OR "SOS;" SECONDLY, THE GOVERNMENT MUST ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF REFUGEES, AND FIND HOUSING FOR THE SEVERAL HUNDRED THOUSAND LEBANESE WHO ARE NOT NOW LIVING IN THEIR OWN HOMES; THIRDLY, LEBANON'S INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES MUST BE RESTORED, NOT ONLY FOR INTERNAL USE, BUT ALSO SO THAT THE COUNTRY CAN RESUME ITS TRADITIONAL ROLE AS A SERVICE CENTER FOR THE ENTIRE MIDDLE EAST; FOURTHLY, RECONSTRUCTION PROPERLY SPEAKING, THAT IS, REBUILDING THE PORT, THE CITY, ETC. THROUGHOUT THIS PROCESS, HE WOULD SIMULTANEOUSLY BE WORKING ON BRINGING THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT BACK TO LIFE, BEGINNING WITH THE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES AND THE ARMY.

4. FOREIGN ASSISTANCE. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT THE MONEY FOR THE REBUILDING OF LEBANON WOULD COME FROM THE FOLLOWING SOURCES: 1) THE ARAB OIL COUNTRIES; 2) FRIENDLY COUNTRIES, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY; 3) INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS; AND 4) WHATEVER COULD NOT BE OBTAINED FROM THE FIRST THREE SOURCES WOULD HAVE TO COME "OUT OF THE LEBANESE MONETARY SYSTEM." WE ALSO DISCUSSED THE MISSION OF HIS SPECIAL ENVOY, GHASSAN TUEINI, TO WASHINGTON (SEPTELS).

5. SOUTH LEBANON. I TOLD THE PRESIDENT THAT I HAD NOTHING NEW TO REPORT ON THE ISRAELI ATTITUDE TOWARDS SOUTH LEBANON. THE PRESIDENT SAID THAT HE FOUND THE ISRAELI ATTITUDE OF COMPLETE HOSTILITY TO THE PRESENCE OF A SMALL ARAB SECURITY FORCE SOUTH OF THE LITANI "INCOMPREHENSIBLE." HE REITERATED THE NECESSITY OF A SMALL FORCE ENTERING THE PORT CITY OF TYRE, PERHAPS SOME 500 TROOPS, TO INTERDICT THE CONTINUED RESUPPLY OF ARMS THROUGH THAT PORT TO THE PALESTINIAN/ LEFTIST COALITION.

6. HEAVY WEAPONS AND GENERAL SECURITY. THE PRESIDENT CONFIRMED THAT HE WOULD PRESIDE AT A MEETING OF THE
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QUADRIPARTITE COMMITTEE (SAUDI ARABIA, JUWAIT, EGYPT, SYRIA) AT 1000 DEC 14. SHORTLY BEFORE MY CALL, HE HAD RECEIVED CREDENTIALS FROM THE SAUDI AND THE KUWAITI AMBASSADORS. HE SAID THAT OVERALL SECURITY SO FAR REMAINS GOOD, ADDING THAT THE LEVEL OF VIOLENT INCIDENTS AT THE PRESENT TIME WAS IN FACT ABOUT AS IT WAS BEFORE THE OUTBREAK OF THE CIVIL WAR IN EARLY 1975. HOWEVER, THE SITUATION COULD DETERIORATE, SINCE

THE VARIOUS FIGHTING FACTIONS WERE JUST AS HOSTILE TO
ONE ANOTHER AS EVER, AND THEY STILL HAD THEIR WEAPONS.

7. COMMENT: THE PRESIDENT SEEMED BUSY, BUT RELAXED
-- AS CHARGE LANE HAD FOUND HIM IN RECENT WEEKS. HE
CONVEYED THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WAS GENUINELY PLEASED
WITH THE PROGRESS HE HAD MADE SO FAR, EVEN THOUGH HE
KNOWS THAT HE IS FAR FROM OUT OF THE WOODS. THE
SECURITY SITUATION IS GOOD, BUT SECURITY HAS NOT YET
BEEN CONSOLIDATED OR ASSURED FOR THE LONGER TERM. IN
THE MEANTIME, HOWEVER, HE IS MOVING AHEAD WITH HIS NEW
GOVERNMENT ON RECONSTRUCTION, AND CLEARLY IS COUNTING
ON THE RECONSTRUCTION EFFORT ITSELF TO HELP CREATE AN
ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH POLITICAL RECONCILIATION MIGHT
REALLY BECOME POSSIBLE. END COMMENT.
HOUGHTON

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